

Bryan does not seek reappointment to FirstNet board, cites potential perception for conflict of interest

Urgent Communications By Donny Jackson

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WASHINGTON, D.C.—Rural telecom executive Tim Bryan yesterday said he did not seek reappointment to the [FirstNet](#) board, because he was worried that his full-time job could be perceived as a conflict of interest that might jeopardize the organization's procurement as it tries to build a nationwide public-safety broadband network.

FirstNet plans to issue a final request for proposal (RFP) for the massive broadband project by the end of the year, and organization officials have been outspoken in their intent to follow federal procurement rules and guidelines. With FirstNet having a statutory requirement to provide service to first responders in rural areas—and telecom carriers expected to play a role in virtually every business model that has been proposed publicly—Bryan said he was afraid that his job as CEO of the National Rural Telecommunications Cooperative (NRTC) could become problematic.

"It might not be a conflict at all, but somebody raises it as an appearance of conflict," Bryan said while talking to media after a session today at the [APCO](#) 2015 show. "You can just see that, with all of the things that I do in my day job, eventually someone could raise it. While it might not be great for me, it could not be good for FirstNet.

"What if it put FirstNet back? What if someone said, 'We're going to raise a challenge based on this?' I don't want that to happen to FirstNet. I've worked too hard and have enjoyed it way too much to have them get setback for some appearance or other things. So, that's it—there's nothing else. I love serving on this board."

Bryan said he did not anticipate his NRTC position would be an issue when he joined the FirstNet board as one of its original members in 2012, noting that he did not understand issues related to the federal acquisitions regulations (FAR) and other government-oriented rules when he joined the board.

“If you had told me three years ago all of the different things that would sort of roll out, in terms of what does an ‘independent authority’ mean, and the FAR—I didn’t even know what the acronym FAR was three years ago,” Bryan said. “Are we going to do procurement? You don’t know all of these things.

“The legislation said, ‘Look, we want to set this board up with a whole bunch of people who theoretically can bring something to this dance—we’re going to bring public safety, we’re going to bring the states, we’re going to bring mayors, we’re going to bring the feds, and we’re going to bring these commercial people. I don’t think anybody even contemplated how that could run into problems, based on a variety of things. I just wasn’t that smart three years ago. I’m a little smarter now.”

One of [FirstNet](#)’s original board members when it was created in 2012, Bryan served as chairman of FirstNet board’s finance committee during his initial three-year term, which expired today. Neither Bryan nor Frank Palestine—a FirstNet board member who recently was named as CEO for a future spinoff of Cree’s power and RF divisions—sought another term on the FirstNet board.

Bryan said he remains passionate about FirstNet’s mission.

“Man, I love serving on this board,” he said. “The public-safety people have been great; the feds have been great to us—the Commerce Department and Larry [Stickling, administrator of the [National Telecommunications and Information Administration](#)], which serves as the umbrella federal agency for FirstNet]. Doing the work on the budget and the RFP is an intellectual challenge—it’s fun and for the right thing.

“I thoroughly enjoyed it, and I’m going to miss it and miss these people.”

During his presentation during today’s [APCO](#) session, Bryan reiterated the fundamental components of FirstNet’s business plan, which calls for \$7 billion in federal funding to be supplemented with several unknown quantities—revenue from user fees, potential synergies with existing network infrastructure, and the value associated with a partner’s secondary use of FirstNet’s 20 MHz of 700 MHz spectrum.

After the session, Bryan said he believes FirstNet can be successful.

“I think there is an answer to that [business-model] equation,” Bryan said. “I’m looking forward to seeing it. Obviously, I won’t get to see it as exactly as it develops, but I think there’s an answer to that equation.”

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